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MR. SMALLEY ON BOOKS AND BOOK LOVERS

I

MR. GEORGE W. SMALLEY has recently been sending to *The Tribune* of this city some interesting and valuable letters which reflect his own taste and ideals as a book collector. He gives high praise to the recently issued catalogue of M. Beraldi's library, published in Paris by M. Conquet, under the title "Estampes et Livres." The Estampes part has a value of its own, but more than three-fourths of this quarto volume of nearly 300 pages is devoted to M. Beraldi's books, and to his comments on them and their fortunes. Not an interesting subject? Well, there are catalogues and catalogues. All catalogues are useful; most are dry; M. Beraldi's is both useful and amusing. His collection is one of the finest anywhere to be found in private hands. His catalogue of it is a history of French bibliography for the last twenty years; a history of book buyers and booksellers and bookbinders; all by one of the most accomplished bibliophiles of an accomplished period, and by one who knows how to tell his story. The catalogue form is strictly adhered to throughout; all the anecdote, comment, revelations, and other diversified matter are given in the shape of notes to the separate titles. The volume contains forty-three illustrations, all but two reproductions of bindings, twelve of them in chromo-typographie by Danel of Lille, who is also the printer of the book. He has no rival anywhere in this specialty of bindings reproduced in color.

"My library," says M. Beraldi, "consists of four hundred works and about a thousand volumes, almost all exceptional copies, which together form a connected history of the art of book-illustration from the 'Daphnis and Chloe' of the Regent, that is, from the first production of vignettes in the eighteenth century, down to the present time." The library is, therefore, sometimes more than a collection of fine books; it has a name; it is a logical whole; you can study on M. Beraldi's shelves the progress of the most exquisite arts ever known. But M. Beraldi is something more than a collector of books, a compiler of catalogues. He is an expert—even an amateur may be an expert—and an author. He has written a history—he prefers to call it a guide or manual—of the engravers of the nineteenth century, in twelve octavo volumes. There may be readers who, till this moment, had not guessed what a large subject this is, of engraving in the nineteenth century.

This present catalogue is also a history, and surely one of the most curious ever written. No more competent hand to write it than M. Beraldi, from whatever point of view you look at him, could be found. He has the enthusiasm of the collector, and perhaps a contempt for the collector who is a collector and nothing more. He had always had a clear object before him; not always the same. It was the art of the last century which first attracted him, and he has become the prophet of the art of this. From the point of view of the bibliophile, the art of this century, so far as it has to do with the illustration of books, is much more modern than the century. It grew up without much help from the amateur of books; appealed far more to the public than to the select band of delicate-minded persons who care for books as books, whether illustrated or not. The legacy of the eighteenth century had been almost exhausted before the legatées turned to the nineteenth. In other words, the illustrations to books and the books for which these illustrations were designed had either passed out of the market or had reached prices which were prohibitive to all but millionaires.

There were, and are, plenty of poor copies and of poor impressions, some of which the millionaire who knows no better still buys. But for the true collector these are valueless, if he cannot have early proofs and eaux-fortes, and separate impressions, and everything in its most brilliant and beautiful state, he will have none. The number of original designs was, of course, still more limited. In these circumstances, driven off the great battle-field of the last century, the collector bethought himself of the present. The combat had ended, not for want of combatants, but for want of something to fight about. The eighteenth had first superseded the seventeenth with its treasures of original editions of the masterpieces of the noblest period of French literature, in its turn to be superseded by its successor. It is not more than ten years ago that the great Morgand, who is the Achilles of M. Beraldi's epic—mourned piteously over the decadence of bibliography.

"Nobody," said he, "cares any more for original editions of the seventeenth century; there are no more illustrated books of the eighteenth to care for. Can you guess, can you imagine, what the new generation of bibliophiles is buying? You will never guess, and I am ashamed to tell you—the illustrated books of the last fifty years, most of them the greatest rubbish on the face of the

earth." If M. Morgand had said some of them, many of them, were rubbish, he would have been quite right. He generalized a little too much—it is a French habit. He had been brought up in the heroic school; had helped form it; through his hands had passed almost everything of the great days that was most lovely and rare and admirable. He could not turn readily to what was so much less admirable. But his lamentation marks with precision the transition from one to the other.

M. Beraldi not only justifies his own share in this movement; he glories in it. When he had exhausted one age, he turned complacently to another. Collection is excellent, but is not creation more excellent still? Is the art of Audran, of Boucher, of Cochin, of Oudry, of Eisen, of Choffard, of Moreau, of Fragonard, to die and leave nothing after it? Were there to be no successors to these delightful artists? If they were to have successors, there must be a public for them; or not a public but a select band of critical admirers with a leader who had authority enough to organize a new departure. M. Beraldi was that leader, a leader in other matters also; and this is his account of his faith, a statement of his point of view, a record of his mission.

"So long as the bibliophile is but a passive admirer of the books of earlier times, so long as he is merely a variety of the bric-à-brac buyer, he is only a man whose mania lends itself to ridicule. . . . The title of bibliophile only becomes interesting, useful, serious when it denotes a man who, according to the measure of his forces, is an active agent in the preservation and renewal of four arts: typography, illustration, engraving, and binding. It is plain that those who are starting out to-day on their career have a fine part to play. Let us wish them every success. The bibliophile of 1875 is dead—long live the bibliophile of 1900!"

A VALUABLE DISCOVERY

AUSTIN, Ill., May 4, 1892.

To the Editor of THE COLLECTOR.

DEAR SIR—What I consider of importance may also interest some of your readers. I refer particularly to those who possess pictures. Some years ago I had occasion to have an old recipe made up at the chemist's with which to prepare an old painting for restoration; fortunately the chemist had never heard of the ingredients named. I then made experiments which led to the most desirable results. I have now a recipe with which I can render the oldest paint elastic, and which also revives the colors. During my chemical experiments I also discovered a mordant which quickly removes the old varnishes without touching color. These recipes have been well tested on many of the best pictures in Chicago. References to Mr. Samuel Nickerson, First National Bank; Mr. Bemis, Richelieu Hotel; Mr. L. H. McCormick, and many others can be proven. In nearly every case I have found very valuable pictures, even some painted but a few years, dry and ready to crack. The dry heat of the houses is a very severe enemy to all paintings. Pictures renovated and nourished by my mordant from time to time cannot crack, but will remain fresh and mellow. Between you and me, sir, a fine painting by George Inness, owned by Mr. Boland Nickerson, had its sky cracked all over; this might have been saved two years ago. I have also found pictures badly varnished cracked when badly laid on, and chilled when inferior varnish has been used. The varnish plays quite an important part in the preservation of a picture.

Very truly yours,

ARTHUR DAWSON.

FORGED SCHILLER, AUTOGRAPHS

PHILADELPHIA, May 10, 1892.

To the Editor of THE COLLECTOR.

DEAR SIR—Can you inform me if the two autographs of Schiller which I enclose are genuine? They have been disputed by several of my friends. I purchased them from a reputable dealer in New York several years ago. Is not the largest public autograph collection to found in Germany?

Very truly,

M—W—D—.

Two collectors of ana relating to Schiller in this city pronounce the autographs forgeries. They state that they are part of a lot foisted on the public by an architect of Weimar named Von Gerstenberg, who was finally detected and brought to trial in that city in 1856. His forgeries fooled greater experts than New York dealers. The greatest autograph collection is that of the National Library at Paris. It reaches back into the Middle Ages. That of the British Museum ranks next, and the German third. Germany has latterly added largely of valuable manuscripts and autographs to her collection.—EDITOR THE COLLECTOR.